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TAGS: PREL AS

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN PM SPEAKS OUT ON GAZA

Classified By: Acting Political Counsellor John W. Crowley for reason 1
.4(d)

¶1. (U) In his first public comment on the Israeli strike on Gaza, vacationing Prime Minister Rudd expressed concern over the continued violence in Gaza and Southern Israel. In a January 5 press interview, Rudd said Australia recognizes Israel's right to self-defense but called on "all parties to avoid any actions which result in unnecessary suffering or increased suffering on the part of innocent civilians". He also cited the need for a diplomatic solution that includes halting arms shipments into Gaza, ending rocket attacks on Israel by the terrorist organization Hamas, and opening border crossings into Gaza. Rudd affirmed GOA support for UN actions towards a ceasefire and concern over humanitarian implications of the conflict and Israel's need to meet those obligations. He stated that any solution "must form part of a longer term compact involving Israel and Palestine, based on a two-State solution". Rudd also highlighted an allocation January 1 of USD 3.5 million for food and medical supplies to the people of Gaza, in addition to the USD 35 million in GOA assistance pledged over the last 12 months.

¶2. (U) In a separate interview today with Deputy PM Julia Gillard, who is acting PM while Rudd is on holiday, reiterated the need for an immediate end to all violence and support for efforts to find a lasting solution. She also emphasized concern about casualties among civilians and stated that the GOA has urged Israel to be mindful of civilians caught in the conflict. In response to a question about the disproportionate casualties between Palestinians and Israelis, she pointed out the need for a lasting solution.

¶3. (C/NF) Justin Whyatt, Executive Director, Middle East and Africa Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, indicated that the GOA is consulting with a number of countries concerning acceptable conditions for a ceasefire, including Egypt's role vis-a-vis Hamas and views on Sarkozy's visit to the region.

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